AN OLD ENGINEER'S STORY

BY JOHN A. HILL

IN THE summer, fall and early winter of 1863 I was tossing chips into an old Hinckley insider up in New England for an engineer by the name of James Dillon. Dillon was considered as good a man as there was on the road; careful, yet fearless; kind-hearted, yet impulsive; a man whose friends would fight for him and whose enemies hated him right royally.

Dillon took a great notion to me and I loved him as a father; the fact of the matter is he was more of a father to me than I had at home, for my father refused to be comforted when I took to railroading, and I could not see him more than two or three times a year at the most—so when I wanted advice I went to Jim.

I was a young fellow then, and being without a home at either end of the run, was likely to drop into pitfalls. Dillon saw this long before I did. Before I had been with him three months he told me one day, coming in, that it was against his principles to teach locomotive running to a young man who was likely to turn out a drunkard or gambler and disgrace the profession, and he added that I had better pack up my duds and come up to his house and let "mother" take care of me—and I went.

I was not a guest there; I paid my room rent and board just as I should have done anywhere else, but I had all the comforts of a home, and enjoyed a thousand advantages that money could not buy. I told Mrs. Dillon all my troubles, and found kindly sympathy and advice; she encouraged me in all my ambitions, mended my shirts and went with me when I bought my clothes. Inside of a month I felt like one of the family, called Mrs. Dillon "mother" and blessed my lucky stars that I had found them.

Dillon had run a good many years and was heartily tired of it, and he seldom passed a nice farm that he did not call my attention to it, saying: "Jack, now there's comfort; you just wait a couple of years—I've got my eye on the slickest little place just on the edge of M——, that I am saving up my pile to buy. I'll give you the Roger William one of these days, Jack, say good evening to grief, and me and mother will take comfort. Think of sleeping till 8 o'clock—and no poor steamers, Jack, no poor "steamers!" And he would reach over and give my head a gentle duck as I tried to pitch a curve to a front corner with a knot; those Hinkleys were powerful on cold water.

In Dillon's household there was a "system" of financial management. He always gave his wife just half of what he earned; kept ten dollars for his own expenses during the month, out of which he clothed himself, and put the remainder in the bank. It was before the days of high wages, however, and even with this frugal management, the bank account did not grow rapidly. They owned the house in which they lived and out of her half "mother" had to pay all the household expenses and taxes, clothe herself and two children and send the children to school. The oldest, a girl of some 16 years, was away at normal school, and the boy, about 13 or 14, was at home, going to the public school and wearing out more clothes than all the rest of the family.

Dillon told me that they had agreed on the financial plan followed in the family before their marriage, and he used to say that for the life of him he did not see how "mother" got along so well on the allowance. When he drew a small month's pay he would say to me, as we walked home: "No cream in the coffee this month, Jack." If it were unusually large he would say: "Plum duff and fried chicken for a Sunday dinner." He insisted that he could detect the rate of his pay in the food, but this was not true—it was his kind of fun. "Mother" and I were fast friends. She became my banker, and when I wanted an extra dollar I had to ask her for it, and tell what I wanted it for, and all that.

Along late in November Jim had to make an extra one night on another engine, which left me at home alone with "mother" and the boy—I had never seen the girl—and after swearing me to be both deaf, dumb and blind, "mother" told me a secret. For ten years she had been saving money out of her allowance, until the amount now reached nearly $2,000. She knew of Jim's life ambition to own a farm, and she had the matter in hand, if I would help her. Of course I was head over heels into the scheme at once. She wanted to buy the farm near M——, and give Jim the deed for a Christmas present; and Jim mustn't even suspect.

Jim never did.

The next trip I had to buy some underclothes; would "mother" tell me how to pick out pure wool? Why, bless your heart, no, she wouldn't, but she'd just put on her things and go down with me. Jim smoked and read at home.

We went straight to the bank where Jim kept his money, asked for the president and let him into the whole plan. Would he take $2,100 out of Jim's money unbeknown to Jim, and pay the balance of the price of the farm over what "mother" had?

No, he would not; but he would advance the money for the purpose—have the deeds sent to him, and he would pay the price—that was fixed.

Then I hatched up an excuse and changed off with the fireman on the M—— branch, and spent the best part of two lay-overs fixing up things with the owner of the farm and arranging to hold back the recording of the deeds until after Christmas. Every evening there was some part of the project to be talked over, and "mother" and I held many whispered conversations. Once Jim, smiling, observed that, if I had any hair on my face, he would be jealous.

I remember that it was on Dec. 14, 1863, that payday came, I banked my money with "mother," and Jim, as usual, counted out his half to that dear old financier.

"Uncle Sam'd better put that 'un in the hospital," observed Jim, as he came to a ragged ten-dollar bill. "Goddess of Liberty pretty near got her throat cut there; guess some reb has had hold of her," he continued, as he held up the bill. Then laying it down he took out his pocketbook and cut off a little three-cornered strip of pink court plaster and made repairs on the bill.

"Mother" pocketed her money greedily, and before an hour I had that very bill in my pocket to pay the recording fees in the court house at M——.

The next day Jim wanted to use more money than he had in his pocket, and asked me to lend him a dollar. As I opened my wallet to oblige him that patched bill showed up. Jim put his finger on it, and then turning me round toward him, he said: "How came you by that?"

I turned red—I know I did—but I said, cool enough: "'Mother' gave it to me in change."

"That's a lie," he said, and turned away.

The next day we were more than two-thirds of the way home before he spoke; then, as I straightened up after a fire, he said: "John Alexander, when we get in, you go to Aleck (the foreman) and get changed to some other engine."

There was a queer look on his face; it was not anger; it was not sorrow; it was more like pain. I looked the man straight in the eye and said: "All right, Jim; it shall be as you say—but, so help me God I don't know what for. If you will tell me what I have done that is wrong I will not make the same mistake with the next man I fire for."

He looked away from me, reached over and started the pump, and said: "Don't you know?"

"No, sir. I have not the slightest idea."

"Then you stay and I'll change," said he, with a determined look, and leaned out of the window and said no more all the way in.

I did not go home that day. I cleaned the "Roger William" from the top of that mountain of sheetiron known as a wood burner stack to the back casting on the tank, and tried to think what I had done wrong, or not done at all, to incur such displeasure from Dillon. He was in bed when I went to the house that evening, and I did not see him until breakfast. He was in his usual spirits there, but on the way to the station and all day long he did not speak to me. He noticed the extra cleaning, and carefully avoided tarnishing any of the cab fittings; but the awful quiet! I could hardly bear it, and was half sick at the trouble the cause of which I could not understand. I thought that if the patched bill had anything to do with it, Christmas morning would clear it up.

Our return trip was the night express, leaving the terminus at 9:30. As usual, that night I got the engine out, oiled, switched out the cars and took the train to the station, trimmed my signals and headlight, and was all ready for Jim to pull out. Nine o'clock came, and no Jim. At 9:10 I sent to his boarding house. He had not been there. He did not come at leaving time—he did not come at all. At 10 o'clock the conductor sent to the engine house for another engineer, and at 10:45, instead of an engineer, a fireman came, with orders for John Alexander to run the "Roger William" until further orders. I never fired a locomotive again.

I went over that road the saddest-hearted man that ever made a maiden trip. I hoped there would be some tidings of Jim at home—there were none. I can never forget the blow it was to "mother"; how she braced up on account of her children—but oh, that sad face! Christmas came, and with it the daughter, and then there were two instead of one—the boy was frantic the first day, and playing marbles the next.

Christmas day there came a letter. It was from Jim—brief and cold enough—but it was such a comfort to "mother." It was directed to Mary J. Dillon and bore the New York postmark. It read:

"Uncle Sam is in need of men, and those who lose with Venus may win with Mars. Inclosed papers you will know best what to do with. Be a mother to the children—you have three of them. JAMES DILLON."

He underscored the three—he was a mystery to me. Poor "mother"! She declared that no doubt "poor James' head was affected." The papers with the letter were a will, leaving her all, and a power of attorney allowing her to dispose of or use the money in the bank. Not a line of endearment or love for that faithful heart that lived on love, asked only for love, and cared for little else.

That Christmas was a day of fasting and prayer for us. Many letters did we send, many advertisements were printed, but we never got a word from James Dillon, and Uncle Sam's army was too big to hunt in. We were a changed family; quieter and more tender of one another's feelings, but changed.

In the fall of '64 they changed the runs around and I was booked to run into M——. Ed, the boy, was firing for me. There was no reason why "mother" should stay in Boston, and we moved out to the little farm. That daughter, who was a second "mother" all over, used to come down to meet us at the station with the horse, and I talked "sweet" to her; yet at a certain point in the sweetness I became dumb.

Along in May, '65, "mother" got a package from Washington. It contained a tintype of herself; a card with a hole in it (made evidently by having been forced over a button), on which was her name and the old address in town; then there was a ring and a saber, and on the blade of the saber was etched, "Presented to Lieutenant James Dillon for bravery on the field of battle." At the bottom of the parcel was a note in a strange hand, saying simply: "Found on the body of Lieutenant Dillon after the battle of Five Forks."

Poor "mother"! Her heart was wrung again, and again the scalding tears fell. She never told her sufferings, and no one ever knew what she bore. Her face was a little sadder and sweeter, her hair a little whiter—that was all.

I am not a bit superstitious—don't believe in signs or presentiments or pre-nothings—but when I went to get my pay on Dec. 14, 1866, it gave me a little start to find in it a bill bearing the chromo of the Goddess of Liberty with the little three-cornered piece of court plaster that Dillon had put on her windpipe. I got rid of it at once, and said nothing to "mother" about it; but I kept thinking of it and seeing it ally the next day and night.

On the night of the 16th I was oiling around my Black Maria to take out a local leaving our western terminus just after dark, when a tall, slim old gentleman stepped up to me and asked if I was the engineer. I don't suppose I looked like the president, I confessed, and held up my torch so I could see his face—a pretty tough looking face. The white mustache was one of that military kind, reinforced with whiskers on the right and left flank of the mustache proper. He wore glasses, and one of the lights was ground glass. The right cheek bone was crushed in, and a red scar extended across the eye and cheek; the scar looked blue around the red line because of the cold.

"I used to be an engineer before the war," said he. "Do you go to Boston?"

"No, to M——."

"M——! I thought that was on a branch."

"It is, but is now an important manufacturing point, with regular trains from there to each end of the main line."

"When can I get to Boston?"

"Not until Monday now; we run no through Sunday trains. You can go to M—— with me tonight, and catch a local to Boston in the morning."

He thought for a minute and then said: "Well, yes; guess I had better. How is it for a ride?"

"Good; just tell the conductor that I told you to get on."

"Thanks; that's clever. I used to know a soldier who used to run up in this country," said the stranger, musing. "Dillon; that's it, Dillon."

"I knew him well," said I. "I want to hear about him.

"Queer man," said he, and I noticed he was eyeing me pretty sharp.

"A good engineer."

"Perhaps," said he.

I coaxed the old veteran to ride on the engine—the first coal-burner I had had. He seemed more than glad to comply. Ed was as black as a negro and swearing about coal-burners in general and this one in particular, and made so much noise with his fire irons after we started that the old man came over and sat behind me, so as to be able to talk.

The first time I looked around after getting out of the yard, I noticed his long, slim hand on the top of the reverse lever. Did you ever notice how it seems to make an ex-engineer feel better and more satisfied to get his hand on the reverse lever and feel the life throbs of the great giant under him? Why, his hand goes there by instinct—just as an ambulance surgeon will feel for the heart of the boy with a broken leg.

I asked the stranger to "give her a whirl," and noticed with what eager joy he took hold of her. I also observed with surprise that he seemed to know all about "four-mile-hill," where most new men got stuck. He caught me looking at his face, and touching the scar remarked: "A little love tap, with the compliments of Wade Hampton's men." We talked on a good many subjects and got pretty well acquainted before we were over the division, but at last we seemed talked out.

"Where does Dillon's folks live now?" asked the stranger, slowly, after a time.

"M——," said I.

He nearly jumped off the box. "M—? I thought it was Boston!"

"Moved to M——."

"What for?"

"Own a farm there."

"Oh, I see; married again?"

"No."

"No!"

"Widow thought too much of Jim for that."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Er—what became of the young man that they—er—adopted?"

"Lives with 'em yet."

"So?"

Just then we struck the suburbs of M——, and, as we passed the cemetery I pointed to a high shaft and said: "Dillon's monument."

"Why, how's that?"

"Killed at Five Forks. Widow put up monument."

He shaded his eyes with his hands and peered through the moonlight for a minute.

"That's clever," was all he said.

I insisted that he go home with me. Ed took the Black Maria to the house ad we took the street cars for it to the end of the line and then walked. As we cleared our feet at the door I said: "Let me see, I did not hear your name?"

"James," said he, "Mr. James."

I opened the sitting room door and ushered the stranger in.

"Well, boys," said "mother," slowly getting up from before the fire and hurriedly taking a few extra stitches in her knitting before laying it down to look up at us, "you're early."

She looked up, not ten feet from the stranger, as he took off his slouched hat and brushed back the white hair. In another minute her arms were around his neck and she was murmuring, "James" in his ear, and I, like a dumb fool, wondered who told her his name.

"Well, to make a long story short, it was James Dillon himself, and the daughter came up and Ed came, and between the three they nearly smothered the old fellow.

You may think it funny he didn't know me, but don't forget that I had been running for three years—that takes the fresh off a fellow; then when I had the typhoid my hair laid off and was never reinstated, and when I got well the whiskers—that had always refused to grow—came on with a rush and they were red. And again, I had tried to switch with an old hook-motion in the night and forgot to take out the starting bar, and she threw it at me, knocking out some teeth; and taking it altogether I was a changed man.

"Where's John?" he said finally.

"Here," said I.

"No!"

"Yes."

He took my hand and said: "John, I left all that was dear to me once because I was jealous of you. I never knew how you came to have that money or why, and don't want to. Forgive me."

"That is the first time I ever heard of that," said "mother."

"I had it to buy this farm for you—a Christmas present—if you had waited," said I.

"That is the first time I ever heard of that," said he.

"And you might have been shot," said "mother," getting up close.

"I tried my darndest to be. That's why I got promoted so fast."

"Oh, James!" and her arms went around his neck again.

"And I sent that saber home myself, never intending to come back."

"Oh, James, how could you!"

"Mother, how can you forgive me?"

Mother was still for a minute, looking at the fire in the grate. "James, it is late in life to apply such tests, but love is like gold; ours will be better now—the dross has been burned away in the fire. I did what I did for love of you and you did what you did for love of me; let us commence to live again in the old way," and those arms of hers could not keep away from him.

Ed went out with tears in his eyes and I beckoned the daughter to follow me. We passed into the parlor, drew the curtain over the doorway—and there was nothing but that rag between us and heaven.

Collar Buttons.

(Denver Post.)

A correspondent asks for a formula of economy.

There is none better than the lesson of the four collar buttons versus a paper of collar buttons.

If you wear detachable cuffs, as most men do, you need four collar buttons, using two as sleeve buttons.

They are very necessary.

If you have only four you have all you used, but you must not lose one.

If you have a dozen you don't care if you lose one.

Consequently, you will lose a button every few days and take another from the store of a dozen.

The dozen will soon disappear and then you will get another dozen.

It becomes necessary for you to have a dozen collar buttons all the time instead of the basic necessity of just four.

And, therefore, the man who has the dozen will buy several dozen in a year, but he has gained no more service from them than the man who has only four gained from his four.

The rule of the collar button applies all along the line of food, drink, clothes, comforts and pleasures.

Is your grocery bill enormous?

Consider how many extra collar buttons are in it.

Of course you don't eat collar buttons, nor have you eaten all those groceries.

Is your coal bill extravagant?

Consider how many extra collar buttons are in it.

Of course you don't burn collar buttons, nor did you get benefit from all that coal.

It's a great and luminous rule—that of the collar buttons.

A Sport to the Last.

(Buffalo Courier.)

"I read in the paper the other day," said Tom Dunn, "where a German over in Hoboken left $25 in his will to treat his friends after his funeral. Of course, the Germans never did anything that the Irish could not equal, and so that story reminded me of another of a Hibernian friend of mine. The doctor told him he only had a few hours to live. He called me over and says he:

"'Tom, I want you to take $10 of me money that's in me wallet and treat me pallbearers.'

"It was a touching moment. Struggling with my emotions, I said to him:

"'I'll do it, Billy. But shall I treat 'em going out or coming back?'

"'Treat 'em going out,' says Billy, a sport to the last. 'I won't be with you coming back.'"

To the Extent of Her Ability.

(Philadelphia Press.)

Miss Plane—He thinks me pretty doesn't he?

Miss Chellus—I'm sure I don't know.

Miss Plane—Why, May told me she heard him telling you I was "just as pretty as I could be."

Miss Chellus—Well?

MISS EDNA D. BURBIDGE,
242 No. 1st West, Winner of the Buck Junior Range.

Captain John B. Burbidge of the police department is the father of the young lady who won the range. All the policemen on the force went to work to help the little girl to win, and many of her clippings came from friends in Ogden. After three weeks of hard work the little lady brought in the greatest number of clippings and won the range, her total number of clippings being 7,571; Adelaide Risley, 729 E. Fourth South was second with 5,781, Afton Lyon, 334 C street, was third with 5,525.

543 Contestants

That is the number of little girls who entered the junior Range contest. We had intended to give them all a trolley party, but on account of the crowds in town for the fair the railway company informed us that it would be impossible for them to furnish cars so we had to give the trolley ride up. But we gave a theatre party for them at Utahna Park from 2 to 4 o'clock and had a little dance afterwards, and to say that they enjoyed themselves would be putting it mildly. Beside this we gave every little girl a box of candy and a sack of fancy popcorn and we know we had the pleasure of giving 543 little girls a good time.

98,637

That is the grand total of our ads that were cut from the papers in the Little Buck's Range Contest. The contest ran for twenty-one days, and we know that the little girls worked hard to win, from the number of bundles that were brought into our store. In our east window the ads have all been thrown, and they make a pile three feet in depth, nine feet wide and eleven feet in length; so you can see how much interest was taken and how hard the little girls worked to win.